



CWDA
Advancing Human Services
for the Welfare of All Californians



January 29, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol Building, 1st Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom,

The county organizations represented on this letter join together to communicate a clear, unified message: innovative policy changes are required to make substantial, immediate, and sustainable progress to reduce homelessness. The recommendation of the Council of Regional Homeless Advisors (Council) to obligate governments to bring unsheltered homeless Californians indoors has the potential to do just that. As such, we are prepared to engage in the effort to construct a thoughtful obligation that is achievable and successful.

Counties agree that a comprehensive crisis response strategy is both appropriate and necessary, as articulated by the Council. If California wants to make progress on homelessness by establishing a new framework via a legal obligation on government, stakeholders must engage in a thoughtful discussion regarding the wide-ranging responsibilities, tools, and resources which will be required to achieve the goal of ending street homelessness. Among other important tools, the Council's comprehensive crisis response strategy includes: expanding and enhancing the Adult Protective Services Program; expanding flexible housing/rental subsidies, and increasing SSI/SSP benefits for those most at risk of homelessness; dedicated funding for board and care facilities; providing landlord incentives to accept the individuals receiving those benefits; increasing the use of publicly owned sites for safe sleeping and interim housing; and reducing regulatory or contracting burdens, and further streamlining CEQA and easing permitting requirements for shelter and affordable housing projects.

While these are all important tools, clearly articulating the state, county, and city responsibilities and revenue streams is primary and paramount to effectuate the proposed mandate. This must include a requirement for local governments to site affordable housing for extremely low-income individuals, as well as shelters and navigation centers. This must be paired with funding to build these housing units. A clear siting requirement must come with targeted CEQA streamlining, be based on data-driven population analysis, and proportionate to the city/county share of the homeless population. Additionally, counties will need to expand our service-provider network to bring to the new housing the public health, health, social, and behavioral health services that are required to address chronic homelessness, while maintaining the existing broader social safety net provided by counties.

A new legal obligation of this magnitude and importance must come with adequate, ongoing, constitutionally-protected funding. Counties have the ability to leverage different funding streams effectively to accomplish universal goals; however, flexibility alone is insufficient to address a problem of this magnitude and complexity. Serious conversations about a legal mandate to address this dire moral crisis must be predicated on the understanding that local governments will require significant additional resources aligned with any new responsibility to reduce street homelessness while recognizing the unique challenges in both urban and rural communities. While California has undertaken efforts to reduce the burden on cities and counties who strive to site affordable housing, construction of this housing depends on funding for incentives and gap financing. Counties believe that defining each level of government's responsibilities and identifying new, sustainable revenue sources to fund the responsibilities must be foundational principles in this effort. These are the core elements that enable accountability and transparency at each level of government.

Counties are developing a comprehensive set of proposals and policy changes that build on what is working, encourage innovative solutions, and bridge to the Council's recommendations and your budget proposals related to homelessness and behavioral health. The progress demanded by our communities requires the state, counties, and cities to act decisively with urgency. Counties fully commit to engage to make significant improvements in the lives of the most vulnerable Californians.

Sincerely,



Graham Knaus
Executive Director
California State Association of Counties



Michelle Doty Cabrera
Executive Director
County Behavioral Health Directors Association



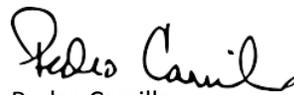
Frank Mecca
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cc: Ann O’Leary, Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor
Ana Matosantos, Cabinet Secretary, Office of the Governor
Jason Elliott, Senior Counselor to the Governor for Housing and Homelessness, Office of the Governor
Mark Tollefson, Deputy Cabinet Secretary, Office of the Governor
Anthony Williams, Legislative Affairs Secretary, Office of the Governor
Keely Martin Bosler, Director, Department of Finance
Mark Ghaly MD, MPH, Secretary, California Health and Human Services Agency